

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Last Chance

We have written so often about the California Gold Rush during these Centennial years, so today we have chosen to acquaint our readers with a gold rush in Monterey county – the Los Burros Mine in the mountains to the south.

There are today two entrances to these old and almost forgotten mines, one by way of Jolon and another down the coast road. Today the journey can be made most of the way by motor car but in the early days miners and visitors traveled by train to King City, then by stage to Jolon, located upon the Milpitas Rancho. In 1890 a writer in a souvenir edition of resources, history and biography of Monterey county, described the country immediately surrounding Jolon and southward, as “a plateau, upon which, during the past few years, many government land claims have been converted into productive farms.” This country was then known as Jolon Flats. It has an elevation of about 1,000 feet above the sea.

From Jolon a journey oceanward of eight miles brings you to Nacimiento River, the terminus of the wagon road, and the commencement of the trail to Los Burros Mines. The early miners would follow the sinuous course of this trail over the ridges, and around mountain sides, which pitched at an angle, in some places, of 45 degrees, ever upward, when, at a distance of some ten miles, the summit of the mountain chain was reached.

The rain that falls in these mountains during the winter months has averaged over 40 inches annually, as much as 72 inches falling in one season. Where the mountains have not been burned over, their sides are covered with an apparently impenetrable growth of underbrush; and a few miles further westward, and seemingly at your feet, thunders the Pacific Ocean.

On the 24th of March, 1887, W.T. Cruikshank found the croppings of a ledge at the head of a canyon about three miles from the ocean. This discovery was probably the first sign of gold to be discovered in Monterey county. An assay of the rock proved it to be very rich. Work and excitement commenced almost immediately, and payrock was obtained, to express it in miners parlance, “From the grass roots down.”

The assays ran from \$100 to \$8,000 per ton; the ore milled freely, most of the quartz being decomposed. A three-stamp mill was put up, and considerable ore was crushed, yielding rich returns, the gold selling then for \$18.25 an ounce.

Still interest and excitement ran high and work went on at fever pitch. After sinking a vein several feet and tracing the ledge to the water's edge three miles away and nearly 4,000 feet below, it was resolved to run a tunnel and tap a vein at the depth of more than 100 feet. Our history relates that this was done, and at a depth of 140 feet a seven foot ledge was encountered, rich as it was at the surface. To reach it several small veins or stringers were cut through, varying from six to 18 inches in width.

More excitement when it became known that estimating only on the rock between the lower level and the surface, there was more than \$3,000,000 in sight. It was declared by the prospectors and the discoverer that the mine would prove to be the richest in all of California. “Last Chance” was the name bestowed upon this rich discovery and plans went rapidly ahead to increase the capacity of the mill.

The news spread and it was not long before not less than 500 claims were staked over an area eight miles square, and nearly all of them owned by persons who waited for the other fellow to start development and make their property valuable. This was given as the reason down through the years for the lack of further prospecting at Los Burros Mines. In addition to Last Chance, a tunnel at the Brewery Mines struck a ledge, and the Salinas Mining Company began operations upon some of the best prospects in the camp.

(More tomorrow)